

Frances Burney: A Gothic Novelist

Research Thesis

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by

Lauren Gerhart

The Ohio State University

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Project Advisor: Professor Noelle Chao, Department of English

“Not every castle is Gothic, and nor every Gothic has a castle”

-*Art of Darkness* by Anne Williams

## I. Abstract

Gothic novels by British women writers such as Ann Radcliffe and the Brontë sisters have been the subject of several decades of research. This project focuses on Frances Burney, an influential woman writer of the late eighteenth-century, and aims to present her as a Gothic novelist. Burney is known for her satirical narrative style. However, one finds that Burney is not always satirical; instead, there are violent and passionate scenes in her narration that are more characteristic of Gothic prose than satire. Upon close inspection of Frances Burney's novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, one finds many Gothic scenes and descriptions, with abnormal occurrences and strange happenings. Thus, my research project will make an argument for approaching these texts as Gothic novels. The process used to provide evidence for this argument has included research on the Gothic and Frances Burney. Critical works consulted include *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, which has helped me to create a working definition of the women's Gothic novel, and Anne Williams's *Art of Darkness*, which has helped me to better understand the Gothic novel and the prose of that time. In my thesis, I provide an overview of the characteristics associated with Gothic fiction. Then I offer readings of *Evelina* and *Cecilia* to establish Burney as a Gothic novelist.

## II. The Gothic Definition

The term “Gothic” is one that has a long history. Our society is still very aware of the term “Gothic.” However, the term has new meaning to us today compared to the way it was perceived during the eighteenth-century. We, today, think of the “Gothic” as being a sense of style or fashion and it can relate to architecture or personality. And these concepts may be represented by dark colors and harsh lines or intensity. In England, in the eighteenth century, the Gothic was a style of writing that involved the manipulation of emotions and feelings. The Gothic was a concept that dealt with terror and horror, fright and passions, violence and conflicts, and the audience’s reaction to the prose. The Gothic novel of the eighteenth-century is difficult to define. It is a type of fiction that has many contradictions and ambiguities, and when literary critics try to discuss its qualities, they end up using broad descriptions. In this section of my essay, I will attempt to clarify some of the ideas revolving around the eighteenth-century Gothic novel and create a working definition for this genre of prose.

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* M. H. Abrams defines the Gothic in a general sense using Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* as a building block to explain the development of this type of narrative:

The **Gothic novel**, or in alternative term, **Gothic romance**, is a type of prose fiction which was inaugurated by Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) [. . .] and flourished through the early nineteenth century. Some writers followed Walpole’s example by setting their stories in the medieval period; others set them in a Catholic country, especially Italy or Spain. The locale was often a gloomy castle

furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences (which in a number of novels turned out to have natural explanations). The principal aim of such novels was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors. Many of them are now read mainly as period pieces, but best opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind. (Abrams 117-118)

Here, it is important to note Horace Walpole's contribution to the definition Abrams creates. Walpole was a Gothic writer who substantially influenced the other writers of this genre, especially in regards to setting. As Abrams states, settings of the Gothic novel were, usually, in an exotic location and a location that included "gloomy" structures and buildings. Abrams continues by adding that the gothic heroine is typically in some way victim to a male villain who cannot control his lustful or raging passions. The gloomy locations and the villainous passions contribute to "the principle aim" of Gothic novels because of the terror these aspects present and stimulate.

Abrams' definition does not end here. Instead, he goes on to explain various aspects and characteristics of the Gothic novel. He expands on his initial definition and description by listing some literary works that fall into this genre of writing, including

William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786)—the setting of which is both medieval and Oriental and the subject both erotic and sadistic—Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

(1794) and other highly successful romances, and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), which exploited, with considerable literary skill, the shock-effects of a narrative involving rape, incest, murder, and diabolism. (Abrams 118)

Abrams rightly lists many eighteenth-century authors of this genre for the purpose of further defining the Gothic novel. The above authors wrote novels that, together, helped define the Gothic novel, inspire the Gothic novel, and expand the Gothic novel.

Even a brief exploration of an early Radcliffe work suggests how much our understanding of the Gothic generation depends on her works. Ann Radcliffe was a key figure who helped define what a Gothic novel is. One of her novels that works with the above sections of Abrams' Gothic definition was *Romance of the Forest* (1791). Radcliffe used violent conflicts, wild passions, abnormal situations, desolate areas, and terror in her novels, in this novel. Radcliffe used this concept to her advantage. Radcliffe uses the imagination of her characters for the suspense of the horror-filled scene. When the characters are alone there is usually an overbearing figure that is taking advantage of the characters. At the very beginning of *Romance of the Forest* the main female character, Adeline, is in the hands of a forceful man: "He now seized the trembling hand of the girl, who shrank aghast with terror, and hurried her towards La Motte, whom surprise still kept her silent. She sunk at his feet, and with supplicating eyes, that streamed with tears, implored him to have pity on her" (Radcliffe 10). Adeline is put into a situation where she is forced to be submissive to an evil man and this submission and violence is the beginning of the Gothic definition. At the beginning of *Romance of the Forest* Radcliffe describes her character's mind while he surveys a scary Abbey he and his party stumble upon, which causes the imagination to blossom, "La Motte paused a moment, for he felt a sensation of sublimity rising into terror—a suspension of mingled astonishment and awe" (Radcliffe 38).

Here, Radcliffe uses the idea of terror to stir the imagination. She wants both her character and reader to feel the mixed emotions that La Motte is experiencing and contemplate the emotions as well.

Radcliffe was one of the main authors of Gothic prose during the late eighteenth-century and her narration is part of the key to understanding the Gothic definition. However, Abrams' Gothic definition goes beyond simply eighteenth-century prose. Later in his definition, Abrams pushes past just the eighteenth-century British authors' and describes those authors who came later. These Romantic and Victorian authors contributions further help to enhance our understanding of "Gothic" prose:

The term 'Gothic' has also been extended to a type of fiction which lacks the exotic setting of the earlier romances, but develops a brooding *atmosphere* of gloom and terror, represents events that are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states. In this extended sense the term 'Gothic' has been applied to William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), Mary Shelley's remarkable and influential *Frankenstein* (1818), and the novels and tales of terror by German E. T. A. Hoffmann. Still more loosely, 'Gothic' has been used to describe elements of the macabre and terrifying that are included in such later works as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*...and *Great Expectations*. (Abrams 118)

The most important point of this passage is the idea of the term "Gothic" being extended to include works that specifically lack an "exotic setting." Though Walpole, Beckford, Radcliffe, and Lewis placed their characters in exotic, and sometimes desolate settings, this characteristic

of the Gothic novel faded because “gloom and terror” were still possible without exotic locations.

For this project, I am also using *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* to further expand on the ideas Abrams presents in his definition of the Gothic. Jerrold E. Hogle begins *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* with an introduction entitled “The Gothic in Western Culture.” This introduction is similar to Abrams’ Gothic definition in that Hogle’s introduction to *The Cambridge Companion* sets out to describe what the Gothic is—and where these fictional works are set:

Though not always as obviously as in *The Castle of Otranto* or *Dracula*, a Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space—be it a castle, a foreign place, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue, such as an office with old filing cabinets, an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory. Within this space, or combination of such spaces, are hidden secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story. These hauntings can take many forms, but frequently assume the features of ghosts, specters, or monsters (mixing features from different realms of being, often life and death) that rise from within the antiquated space, or sometimes invade it from alien realms, to manifest unresolved crimes or conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view.

(Hogle 2)

Obviously, it is vital to note the many different locations that Hogle lists as he provides an overview of the various settings that appear in the Gothic novels. In addition, Hogle's ending to the above excerpt is essential to the definition of the Gothic novel that I am presenting. In the various settings a Gothic novelist would have chosen, the author would have had something haunting the characters. This haunting could have been an apparition, a villain, or a secret. Secrets were, many times, the key problem characters in Gothic novels confronted. Secrets from past lives, past moments, past relationships, or past experiences were capable of causing extreme terror for the characters present in such Gothic novels as *Romance of the Forest* or *Jane Eyre*.

The terror involved with Gothic novels could have resulted from a character's secrets or could have resulted from any number of different circumstances. Also, a character could experience something like horror, rather than terror. Hogle continues his introduction by noting the difference between these two emotions:

This oscillation can range across a continuum between what have come to be called the "terror Gothic" on the one hand and the "horror Gothic" on the other. The first of these holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows or suggestions from a hidden past, while the latter confronts the principal characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms (including the repressions) of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences.

(Hogle 3)

Gothic situations involving terror, or "terror Gothic," are circumstances involving problems that result from past secrets. Secrets, again, can cause such haunting of the characters that they are



put into situations that test their mental capacity. Gothic situations involving horror, or “horror Gothic,” encompass violence—either physically or psychologically—and turn “everyday life” into something abnormal or alarming. Hogle further states, “This pattern of hyperbolically verbalizing contradictory fears and desires over a possible ‘base’ of chaos and death, and in a blatantly fictional style, remains a consistent element in the Gothic...” (Hogle 5).

Fear, death, violence and conflict are just a few of the words used to describe the Gothic novel, and they are just a few of the themes covered by the authors writing Gothic fiction. Hogle also explores an important aspect that Abrams briefly writes about as well: the concern with gender in Gothic novels. Hogle could not ignore the pattern of Gothic heroines being suppressed by male villains, noticing that “...Gothic *heroines*...seek both to appease and to free themselves from the excesses of male and patriarchal dominance in Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* (1783-85), Ann Radcliffe’s romances of the 1790s, and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), and many ‘female Gothics’ thereafter” (Hogle 5). The theme of female heroine versus male villain is a plot point that is embraced by many Gothic novels and continues to be analyzed by many critics of the genre.

Abrams notes that Gothic novel’s by women often addressed societal norms about gender: “Critics have recently drawn attention to the many women writers of Gothic fiction, and have explained features of the mode as the result of the suppression of female sexuality, or else as a challenge to the gender hierarchy and values of a male-dominated culture” (Abrams 118). This “challenge” towards gender issues of the time period is an important part of understanding the Gothic. In fact, gender made the definition even more ambiguous, because gender became a contested part of the definition itself, with some critics separating the Gothic into two different types: Female Gothic and Male Gothic.

To better understand the difference between Male and Female Gothic, I began my research with *Gothic Fiction: a Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* by Angela Wright because this study gives some background on the two different terms. Wright explains that Ellen Moers first used the term "Female Gothic" in her work entitled *Literary Women* (1976). One of Moers' objectives was to define this term; however, when discussing Moers' definition, Wright argues that Moers' definition is not straightforward:

In Moers' argument, the definition of 'Female Gothic' shifts rapidly from being straightforwardly defined through the gender of the author to an exploration of the aesthetics of the form. Radcliffe's publishing success secures her reputation as mistress of the pure Gothic form,' but for Moers, Radcliffe's reputation rests upon her enterprising use of a 'young women' in all of her novels. For Moers, this is the theme that launched the 'Female Gothic' genre. Besides Moers' hesitation in categorizing 'Female Gothic' through gender or aesthetics, there is a more immediate problem in her identification of Radcliffe as the pioneer of this form. Moers does not acknowledge previous women writers, such as Sophia Lee, who early as 1785 produced a narrative with two young women at its centre, entitled *The Recess*. (Wright 127)

Wright criticizes Moers' definition of the Female Gothic because it does not match other known Gothic novels, and it shows some serious flaws in its description. Therefore, I went to Anne Williams to find a more recent critic's work on the difference between Male Gothic and Female Gothic.

In her book *Art of Darkness*, Williams writes about the Gothic. She strives to argue about several concepts of the genre and distinctly marks the definition of masculine versus

feminine Gothic, stating “I shall argue that the ‘male’ and ‘female’ traditions employ two distinct sets of literary conventions. Both may find expression in drama, lyric, or narrative, in verse or in prose, in canonical high Romantic works, in serious ‘novels,’ or in popular formula fiction from the eighteenth century to the present” (Williams 100). From here, Williams spends several pages speaking about the Male Gothic novel first, and then the Female Gothic novel. In the Male Gothic novel, there are several key characteristics that separate the prose from Female Gothic prose: the supernatural features of the male plot line are a reality; the plot is filled with horror and explicit fright; the narrative has many points of view; the male hero is attracted to a beautiful female in the course of the story but also hates her; the reader and narrator lack sympathy towards the main character; the plot ends with the death of the main character; the beautiful female counter-part of the main character loses her virtue—usually by the main character—during the plot; the female is weak and the weakness leads to her loss of virginity; and the plot is filled with explicit eroticism and sexual desires. Williams lists these details of Male Gothic and compares the details to what she defines as the Female Gothic. A Female Gothic Williams describes is essentially the opposite of the Male Gothic. In a Female Gothic novel, the supernatural occurrences of the tale are explained, there is terror of the imagination rather than explicit horror; the plot is told by the heroine’s point of view; the heroine is usually attracted to the male villain without hatred; the reader has sympathy for the heroine throughout the novel, the novel ends with a marriage that is sometimes tragic; the female characters have a sense of independence; and the novel focuses on repressed sexual desires rather than explicit sexual desires. Another important difference between the Male and Female Gothic is that the Female Gothic is “[insistent] on the possibilities of female ‘reason’...” (Williams 138). This difference

is key to understanding the Female Gothic because the heroine uses skills that a female in a Male Gothic novel normally would not possess.

Therefore, according to Williams, there is a distinctive difference between Male and Female Gothic:

Male Gothic is a dark mirror reflecting patriarchy's *nightmare*, recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother/*mater* denigrated as 'female.' 'Female Gothic' creates a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the 'male' and the 'female,' the 'line of Good' and the 'line of Evil,' are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the father's corridors of power. (Williams 107)

While I do not have time in my thesis to explore the matriarchal and patriarchal aspects of the Gothic novel I have concluded this quote to further explain the masculine and feminine Gothic by describing the reflection of the two sub-genres that emerge.

Williams' distinction is furthered proved by E. J. Clery's *Women's Gothic: from Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*. In the introduction of her novel, Clery begins by explaining the assumptions that females have acquired through their writings. These assumptions stem from familial—matriarchal and patriarchal—concepts that come from feminine tradition. From there she asks:

But what happens if we lay aside our assumptions about women's writing and look again at women's Gothic? What we find there suggests the need for another story: wild passions, the sublime, supernatural phenomena, violent conflict, murder and torture,

sexual excess and perversion, outlandish settings, strange minglings of history and fantasy. (Clery 2)

Leaving behind the assumptions and stereotypes of women's literary works, Clery defines aspects that are found within Gothic novels—aspects that need to be reassessed and brought to light. In Clery's opinion Female Gothic novel is a novel that possesses critical creativity, from many female authors, that Clery wants to bring forth. As she continues her writings on the Female Gothic, she talks about history of the writing that includes female authors. According to Clery, we have to take these writers into account if we want to understand the Gothic and, especially, the Female Gothic:

Gothic literature sees women writers at their most pushy and argumentative. Clara Reeve takes Walpole to task on the proper management of the supernatural in the preface to *The Old English Baron*. Harriet Lee, sister of Sophia, publicly denounces the management of Drury Lane for turning down her play *The Mysterious Marriage*, and claims precedence over 'Monk' Lewis for the idea of introducing a 'real ghost' on stage. The teenaged Charlotte Dacre shamelessly demands the patronage of Lewis, in the dedication of her first novel *The Confessions of the Nun of St Omer*, which rivaled his work for lurid sensationalism" (Clery 3).

Along with Radcliffe the above authors, Reeve, Lee, and Dacre, help to define the Female Gothic because their writing was aggressive and challenged the male writers of that time.

### III. Frances Burney and the Gothic

Because of the Female Gothic section of the Gothic definition Frances Burney can be proven a Gothic novelist through her first two novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. Using the above

definition I will now analyze excerpts from Burney's first two novels to prove her a Gothic novelist.

The Gothic genre is one that relies on a definition that has been created by certain Gothic authors. This definition, then, only adheres to those authors that have a specific way of narrating their Gothic tales. However, other authors fit into this certain definition. Frances Burney began her novel writing during eighteenth-century Britain. During this time period, there were several forms of literary style including the infamous Gothic novel and the satirical novel. Originally, Frances Burney was thought of as a satirical novelist because of her commentary on urban British society. However, Frances Burney was doing something a little cleverer. Frances Burney took urban society and made its members experience abnormal situations. Though her witty scenes are worthy of laughter, the scenes are also worthy of intense analysis for the discovery of her deeper Gothic roots. Julia Epstein, the author of *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*, noticed something similar about Frances Burney's works, that her novels are understudied, "The project of [Julia Epstein's] book might be said to convert Burney from the status of a 'minor' writer to that of a 'major' writer" (Epstein 3). Epstein argued that Burney was a major writer, with a specific style of prose, but I am proving that Burney was a Gothic novelist with satirical commentary. This style allowed Burney to narrate and comment on British urban society. Frances Burney is known for her laugh-out-loud satire, however, as Julia Epstein questions, "Why has Burney's aggressive violence not been read" (Epstein 4)? Her violent scenes are the key to understanding what Burney was doing stylistically.

Burney wrote lewd scenes that her young female characters faced and conquered, showing that she could use her imagination and could handle Gothic fables. Therefore, Burney

was a female writer that depicted urban British society in the midst of the Gothic imagination. This hyperbolizing of urban society was also, indeed, a way in which to comment on London society. To answer the question of why Frances Burney's "violence", as stated by Julia Epstein, has not been taken into account is because she was simply thought of as a satirical novelist, when in fact she was a novelist of her own clever style—a style consisting of Gothic and satire. It is important to note that Burney was not satirizing the Gothic novel; instead, she was using both genres to complete her prose. This essay will use Gothic excerpts from Burney's first two novels to make the argument that she is a Gothic novelist.

Burney's novels began in 1776 with *Evelina* and continued with *Cecilia* in 1782. In 1791 the forerunner of the Gothic novel and Gothic literature, Ann Radcliffe, published her Gothic novel entitled *Romance of the Forest*. This Gothic novel is different from Frances Burney's prose, though has the same basic violent and scary Gothic scenes as Burney's novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. Further, Burney's novels came before Ann Radcliffe's novels, suggesting that Burney was already writing Gothic novels before Radcliffe.

Frances Burney's creative way of manipulating the reader's emotions employed a new style of the Gothic style that combines, during many scenes of her novels, violence and passion with satirical commentary on the reactions of urban society in London. The next sections analyze certain passages from Burney's novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia* and prove the novels to be Gothic novels and prove Burney to be a Gothic novelist.

#### IV. *Evelina*

Frances Burney's first novel *Evelina* is a story that a reader receives much pleasure from, especially the fairy tale ending. However, the novel has many scenes that dip into the Gothic

definition, but with Burney's sense of prose. The below excerpts describe the Gothic novel that Burney was writing because of Burney's sense of violence and terror for her main character Evelina. With the passages described and analyzed one can prove *Evelina* to be a Gothic novel and can prove Frances Burney a Gothic novelist.

One of the main points of *Evelina's* plot is to show Evelina's entrance into society. This introduction leads the character to become a part of many public places in London. One of the popular destinations for the urban population of London was Marybone-gardens. At these gardens were activities ranging from fireworks to prostitution. In other words, it is a perfect situation for a Gothic scene to be set; not only is the scene crafted to become abnormal, but it is also a place worthy of terror. In volume 2, letter 21, Evelina and her party decide to go to the gardens to watch the fireworks and other activities. While there, a loud firework explodes, and Evelina is separated from her party because they all jump away from one another. From there, Evelina becomes entangled in a mixture of the bad parts of London society. While looking for her party, Evelina becomes lost in the maze of people and activities. In the mess, she collides with a man and he crudely says to her "'You are a sweet pretty creature, and I enlist you in my service;' and then, with great violence he seized my hand. I screamed aloud with fear..." (Burney 134). This is scary for a young woman to behold and represents the terror Evelina feels especially as the scene moves forward toward other abnormal circumstances. Evelina is able to yank away from the man mentioned above and then runs towards a group of women she hopes to gain safety from. Evelina begs protection from the women walking around her and comes to find that these women are prostitutes. Writing to her guardian, she explains that their conversation "...soon, to my inexpressible horror, convinced me I had sought protection from insult, of those who were themselves most likely to offer it! You, my dearest sir, I well know,



will both feel for and pity my terror, which I have no words to describe” (Burney 134). It would have been v unusual for a young woman to become held by prostitutes in such a public scene, after just being harassed by a man suggesting Evelina to be “enlisted in his service.” It is extreme that the heroine is assaulted by both men and women. The abnormal sequences of events at this present moment take, not only the character by surprise, but also the reader. Burney uses her sense of the Gothic to develop a scene that combines terror with a touch of comic relief, following the feminine Gothic genre—the comic relief coming from the hyperbolic description of Evelina’s circumstances. The use of the female Gothic is further highlighted during these events because of the reasoning Evelina uses while she runs from one obstacle to the next. Burney uses the Gothic’s “...insistence on the possibilities of female ‘reason’...” (Williams 138). Evelina walks the reader through what she is feeling, seeing, hearing, and what she needs to do to get through her terror. She knows that her situation is bad and knows that she needs to escape and find her party; and her fear from terror directs her towards the correct path. Her reasoning tells her to escape from the man that takes hold of her and to run from the prostitutes that pretend to be her protectors. Her reasoning tells her not only to escape, but to fight to escape.

The above scene is not the only abnormal occurrence that Evelina deals with in one of London’s popular gardens. Earlier in volume two there is also another scene involving public gardens where Evelina has to use her feminine reason to move through the events she encounters. When she and her party visit Vauxhall Evelina is forced into a situation where she experiences the abnormal qualities of a Gothic environment and is then separated from her guardians and party:

... a large party of gentlemen, apparently very riotous...seemed to rush suddenly from behind some trees, and, meeting [my cousins and me] face to face, put their arms at their sides, and formed a kind of circle, that first stopped our proceeding, and then our retreating, for we were presently entirely enclosed. The Miss Branghtons screamed aloud, and I was frightened exceedingly; our screams were answered with bursts of laughter, and, for some minutes, we were kept prisoners, till, at last, one of them, rudely, seizing hold of me, said I was a pretty little creature. (Burney 197)

This Gothic scene depicts Evelina, again, in a fit of terror. These emotions and events cause Evelina to plunge into emotions that are, to use E.J. Clery's phrase, not in her "normal range of experience" (Clery 13). Emotions are essential for this Gothic scene to be complete, and the emotions continue to escalate when Evelina breaks herself free from those imprisoning her: "Terrified to death, I struggled with such vehemence to disengage myself from him, that I succeeded, in spite of his efforts to detain me; and immediately, and with a swiftness which fear only could have given me, I flew rather than ran up the walk..." (Burney 197). As one can see, Evelina's terror escalates and her narrative continues to provide suspense for the reader. Her experience is a violent conflict that she, as a young woman in this time period, should not have had to endure. Nevertheless, she uses her fear to reason and escape. Therefore, reason gives female characters an opportunity to exercise reason and power.

*Evelina* also depicts scenes of potential death that allow Burney to express her sense of the Gothic; the danger involved with the deaths, also, causes pain for the characters and for the readers. Evelina experiences the danger of death up-close. One day, Evelina sees a man, who is later discovered to be her brother, getting ready to attempt suicide. This scene is terrifying for

Evelina. She becomes extremely frightened, and then saves the man by begging him not to commit the act. When writing to her guardian to explain her situation, she states:

I have been shocked to death... I was inexpressibly shocked. All that I had heard of [this man's] misery occurring to my memory, made me conclude, that he was, at that very moment, meditating suicide! [...] Taking both the pistols, one in each hand, he dropped hastily upon his knees... Wild with fright... I caught, almost involuntarily, hold of both his arms, and exclaimed 'O sir! Have mercy on yourself! (Burney 184)

This is a very abnormal scene for a young woman of eighteenth century London to stumble upon. The potential of hearing or viewing a suicide creates an atmosphere of terror and is classically Gothic, insofar as it involves terror, violence and extreme emotions. Evelina becomes impassioned about Mr. Macartney's potential suicide, and allows her fright to dictate her subsequent actions. With Evelina's heightened emotions comes suspense for the reader, which furthers the Gothic nature of the scene. Even the language used is synonymous with Gothic language. Evelina states that she was almost "shocked to death" which not only reveals her terror, but also the cause of terror—death. She then stresses her fright for the reader by saying that she was "wild with fright" because of this man's desire for death. Frances Burney uses death to her advantage and intends for her reader to experience strong emotions. At this part, Evelina is put in a room alone by a Mr. Branghton to wait for her cousins to arrive to his shop. While alone, she encounters Mr. Macartney and his troubled mind.

Violent conflicts are also described in Burney's *Evelina*. The violence in *Evelina* occurs several times and at different magnitudes. For example, one scene of violence is because of a conflict between two characters. Though conflict or quarreling can happen between two

characters in any novel, a novel that contains a scene with abnormal, violent conflict delves into the Gothic style. Evelina's complicated family past haunts her every action within the novel, and one of the most important figures from her past is her grandmother Madame Duval. Madame Duval is a rather crude French woman that embarrasses Evelina publically several times and creates enemies for her. One of the enemies of Madame Duval is Captain Mirvan, the husband of Mrs. Mirvan, one of Evelina's guardians. Captain Mirvan crafts a scheme against Madame Duval that Evelina becomes, involuntarily, a part of. Captain Mirvan and his libertine Sir Clement Willoughby kidnap Evelina and her grandmother so that her grandmother can be taught a lesson—a lesson the Captain believes Madame should learn. In this scheme, the Captain ties the grandmother up, pushes her in the dirt, and tears her clothes. When Evelina finally discovers her grandmother:

She was sobbing, nay, almost roaring, and in the utmost agony of rage and terror...

Almost bursting with passion, she pointed to her feet and with frightful violence, she actually beat the ground with her hands. I then saw, that her feet were tied together with a strong rope, which was fastened to the upper branch of a tree, even with a hedge which ran along the ditch where she sat... Her dress was in such disorder... Her head-dress had fallen off; her linen was torn; her negligee had not a pin left in it... She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her head, and the dust from the road, were quite pasted on her skin by tears, which, with her rouge, made so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human. (Burney 149-150)

A scene such as this rarely appeared in the fictionalized versions of eighteenth-century London's society and rarely would two women been drawn into such a violent scheme. In contemporary literature it is quite abnormal that a man should kidnap a woman of an older age and abuse her in

such a manner. This is a Gothic scene because of the kidnapping and the emotions that were portrayed during the scene. The scene included classic Gothic facets such as violence, kidnapping, conflict, and passion.

The scene above also included much passion because while Evelina's grandmother was being tied up and beaten, Sir Clement blocked Evelina from escaping the carriage and proposed his violent love for her, crying ““Deny me not, most charming of women, deny me not this only moment that is lent me, to pour forth my soul into your gentle ears—to tell you how much I suffer from your absence—how much I dread your displeasure—and how cruelly I am affected by your coldness!”” (Burney 147). Evelina is not accustomed to hearing such violent feelings. This scene is set in true Gothic form because of the emotions driving the characters. The Captain is driven by his intense dislike for Madame Duval and Sir Clement is driven by his passion for Evelina. With these heightened emotions, Evelina and Madame Duval are then put into a state of pure terror; while the reader is in suspense to see how the women deal with this emotional situation. Again, the language Frances Burney chooses to use in her character's diction is critical to our understanding of this moment as a Gothic scene. Words such as “agony”, “rage”, “terror”, and “violence” are used just in the first excerpt; with these words the reader is aware of the intense emotions riding in each character's mind. Madame Duval, unaware of the perpetrators, is so frightened and full of feeling that she screams ““I've no doubt but we shall be all murdered!”” (Burney 146).

Though this scene does make the reader laugh, because of how ridiculously Madame Duval's character behaves, the reader cannot escape the feeling of suspense. Here, Burney is using her wit to combine terror and comedy, thus creating something like Anne Williams' Female Gothic, “Its comic plot [and] its emphasis on terror...” create the genre at hand

(Williams 138). This scene is far funnier than the other scenes in *Evelina*, showing Burney's original prose. Burney can undoubtedly weave terror and comedic effect into her Gothic scenes and create a plot point that focuses the reader's attention—again the idea of suspense and emotional response from the reader is crucial to the Gothic style. Burney can deliver an undeniably Gothic situation for her unforgettable characters because of her ability to manipulate emotions.

#### V. *Cecilia*

Burney continues with comedic relief and Gothic style into the narration of her second novel *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress*, which was published in 1782. Further, this novel deals more with the Gothic style than comedic relief, but does still contain elements of comedy. Unlike *Evelina*, the Gothic scenes continue with unhappy sequences for the main character. Like, *Evelina*, Burney's *Cecilia* deals with death several times.

The scenes of death and potential death in *Cecilia* deal with one of her three guardians twice during her narrative. Cecilia's guardian, Mr. Harrel, is deeply in debt. He and his wife spend much more money than they have and managed to go so deeply into debt that they simply cannot repay their bills; because of this, Mr. Harrel begins asking Cecilia for money since she is an heiress with a fortune of thirty thousand pounds. The first time he asks her for money the sum is relatively small. Later on, however, he asks her for thousands of pounds. In this scene of extortion, he manages to get Cecilia away from everyone in the house, therefore putting her in a situation where she is isolated from any means of support. Then he blackmails her into giving him the money, by claiming that he will commit suicide if she does not meet his demands:

Her terror was now inexpressible; she believed him in the very act of suicide, and her refusal of assistance seemed the signal for the deed: her whole fortune, at that moment, was valueless and unimportant to her, compared with the preservation of a fellow-creature: she called out with all the vehemence of agony to beg he would open the door, and eagerly promised by all that was sacred to do everything in her power to save him. At these words he opened it; his face was totally without color, and he grasped a razor in his hand. (Burney 265-266)

In this passage, Cecilia is scared that her guardian will do something harmful to himself. She has chased after him and thrusts herself into a situation where she is with a man unstable enough to blackmail her with the threat of suicide. Mr. Harrel has locked himself into his room; after he comes out of the room with a razor pointed towards his wrists, he says, “You have stopped me, at the very moment I had gathered courage for the blow; but if indeed you will assist me, I will shut this up—if not, I will steep it in my blood!” (Burney 266). What makes this scene a Gothic scene is Cecilia being alone, Cecilia’s mental process, Burney’s diction, Mr. Harrel’s blackmail scheme, and the potential of death. Burney’s creative violence in this scene is not only shown in the character’s emotions but also the reader’s. Not only is anger and terror present in the sea of emotions, but also a sense of repulsion because of Mr. Harrel’s blackmail. Burney’s description of “agony” and “inexpressible” terror to manipulate emotions makes sure to demonstrate what Cecilia is feeling emotionally, seeing emotionally, hearing emotionally, and thinking emotionally. This, arguably, is the sublime because the terror leads to sublimity for Cecilia. This terror leads to the sublime because the terror becomes a crucial aspect of Cecilia’s mind process—it overcomes any other emotion she could have at this moment. Because fear is driving most of these emotions, Cecilia easily gives into Mr. Harrel and says she will lend him

money. This reasoning, though not the wisest, clearly expresses Cecilia's fear and terror.

Cecilia she is very rational and sensible as a character, therefore her decisions in this scene are not usual. Instead, the decisions are overcome by the fear she has in regards to Mr. Harrel's behavior.

Burney continues with her use of death for Gothic terror when Mr. Harrel does commit suicide later in the novel (similarly to Mr. McCartney's potential suicide in *Evelina*). Though Cecilia helps Mr. and Mrs. Harrel by lending them eight thousand pounds, their debts are too great for Mr. Harrel to pay off. Mr. Harrel has no money, but nevertheless he decides to take his party to Vauxhall gardens, the same gardens in which Evelina finds herself lost, where he begins drinking a lot. While drinking, he begins acting very aggressively and stupidly. He draws the attention of other guests around him as his voice becomes louder. Then, he commits suicide:

"No!" cried he, suddenly embracing her, "by this parting kiss!" then wildly jumping upon his seat, he leapt over the table and was out of sight in an instant. Amazement seized all who remained...the manner of his departure affrighted them, and his preceding behavior had made them cease to expect it: Mrs. Harrel, leaning upon Cecilia, continued to weep, while she...scarce knew whether she should stay... or fly after Mr. Harrel, who she feared had incapacitated himself from finding his chaise... This, however, was but the apprehension of a moment; another and a far more horrible one drove it from her imagination: for scarcely had Mr. Harrel quitted the box and their sight, before their ears were suddenly struck with the report of a pistol. Mrs. Harrel gave a loud scream, which was involuntarily echoed by Cecilia... (Burney 413)



This scene has the same Gothic features as the other scene analyzed; however, the scene above happens in a public place—in urban society. Burney’s classic Gothic scene is described here. After the pistol is shot, all who were present proceeded to move toward the sound they heard and see what happened. This scene is truly Gothic because of the death, paralleling Burke.

One of the only other critics that uses the Gothic to explain Burney, and specifically Burney’s *Cecilia*, is Juliet McMaster. In her article entitled “The Suicide Scene in *Cecilia*: Frances Burney and the Realistic Gothic” McMaster analyzes *Cecilia* and argues that the violence and other Gothic themes present in *Cecilia* are doing something more than originally thought:

I have been examining a scene of bewildering Gothic contrasts of light and dark, celebration and desperation, powerlessness and responsibility, where actions are unexplained, words go for nothing, messengers don’t return, and confusion reigns: a surrealistic world as we might consider it. The surrealist painters and writers of the early twentieth century rejected the control of reason and courted the bizarre imagery of the dream, in order to attain a fuller or “*sur*”-reality. They admired the art of Bosch and Piranesi and the dark predictabilities of Gothic novels for their approach to the unordered and unrestrained imagery of the unconscious. But Cecilia craves order and moral accountability. The unexplained violence and nightmare juxtapositions of the Vauxhall scene, though she copes with them well at the time, unbalance her and shake her reason. When the darkness and powerlessness and threat of violence recur, as in the late-night scenes towards the end of the novel, she recalls the bloody death of Harrel as a kind of rehearsal for the bloody death of the man she loves. The trauma of Vauxhall seems added to her present crisis; and her mind gives way. (McMaster 223)

Here, McMaster explains the “trauma” Cecilia experiences at Vauxhall gardens when Mr. Harrel commits suicide. Though McMaster does not come out and say that Frances Burney is a Gothic novelist, she does give Burney credit for developing Gothic themes by explaining “the unexplained violence and nightmare juxtapositions” involved with *Cecilia*. As McMaster explains, Cecilia likes normalcy and Mr. Harrel’s death is an experience that allows her to feel fright and causes an abnormal situation where normalcy is not present. McMaster does something else interesting with this fact by using the term “Realistic Gothic” in her article’s title. McMaster does not fully define the term in her article, but the term is similar to what I am proving in this essay. I will be appropriating the term she used to help further clarify Burney’s Gothic. McMaster makes the point of describing that the Gothic used in Burney’s *Cecilia* is different from the normal definition of Gothic, but that Burney is using the Gothic in a way that the audience, or readers, can relate to. The settings described in Burney’s novels are settings in which her readers would have been very familiar with; therefore the terror she crafts within these familiar places would have been abnormal, but relatable for the readers.

Burney continues with putting her character in situations that are familiar for her readers as the novel (and her other novels) progresses. When Burney’s main character Cecilia enters society, she begins to be “chased” by many different men and becomes trapped in many suspenseful scenes. Her beauty is irresistible to many of the men around her; because of these men Cecilia becomes entangled in a series of unfortunate events. One night, when Cecilia is in need of a protector to walk with her, two men, Mr. Belfield and Sir Robert Floyer, fight for her hand, and a duel ensues:

Belfield, with great indignation, demanded what [Sir Robert] meant by the term impertinent fellow; and Sir Robert, yet more insolently repeated it: Cecilia, extremely

shocked, earnestly besought them both to be quiet; but Belfield, at the repetition of this insult, hastily let go her hand and put his own upon his sword, while Sir Robert, taking advantage of his situation in being a step higher than his antagonist fiercely pushed him back, and descended into the lobby. Belfield, enraged beyond endurance, instantly drew his sword, and Sir Robert was preparing to follow his example, when Cecilia, in an agony of fright, called out, ‘Good Heaven! Will nobody interfere?’ (Burney 137-138)

This is an extremely public scene. The characters are present at an Opera, where many of their social acquaintances are present to see the duel form. Later on, Sir Robert pulls out a pistol and shoots Mr. Belfield, almost killing him. In the excerpt above, Burney’s choice of words expresses the terror Cecilia has been exposed to: at various points, she is “shocked,” and in “an agony of fright.” This language emphasizes the horror of the scene. Cecilia’s emotional response creates serious terror for the reader because it is a violent.

Though *Cecilia* does not have the same level of comic relief as *Evelina* during the Gothic scenes, the novel does have many moments of laughter that often stem from Cecilia’s embarrassing moments as she deals with her “unique” guardians and obstacles. *Cecilia* differs most from *Evelina* in regards to the ending. *Evelina* ends with a “happily ever after” while *Cecilia* concludes on an ambiguous note:

The upright mind of Cecilia, her purity, her virtue, and the moderation of her wishes, gave to her in the warm affection of Lady Delvile, and the unremitting fondness of Mortimer, all the happiness human life seems capable of receiving—yet human it was, and as such imperfect! She knew that, at times, the whole family must murmur at her loss of fortune, and at times she murmured to herself to be thus portion less, though an

HEIRESS. Rationally, however, she surveyed the world at large, and finding that of the few who had any happiness, there were none without some misery, she checked the rising sigh of repining mortality, and, grateful with general felicity, bore partial evil with cheer-fullest resignation. (Burney 941)

The language in this passage suggests that Burney intended the ending of her novel to be unhappy; even though Cecilia is with Mr. Delvile, the final paragraph of the novel portrays her “loss of fortune” and ends with her bearing “partial evil with cheer-fullest resignation.” Such language does not appear in the happy ending of *Evelina*.

One way to explain this shift in tone would be to think of the ending of *Cecilia* as a Gothic ending. Anne Williams, in her study of the Gothic, has suggested that “The theme of marriage, for instance, so prominent in the Female Gothic conclusion, cannot within a strictly realist context be read as a ‘happy ending’” (Williams 138). Here, Williams argues that marriages in Gothic literature do not necessarily lead to happy endings. From this perspective, Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* [Cecilia has a Gothic ending because of the marriage circumstances]. Though Burney’s first novel *Evelina* has the classic happy ending that would later be mimicked in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, her novel *Cecilia* takes a different approach, one that is far more similar to the approach Ann Radcliffe would use in the 1790s. The lead female character does marry the man she fancies, but the marriage is shadowed by the heroine’s past familial and economic problems. *Cecilia* is a novel that can be a part of the Gothic genre because of the violent scenes, varying emotions, and sorrowful ending.

## VI. Conclusion

At my oral defense of my thesis I was asked why it is important that we view Frances Burney as a Gothic novelist rather than a satirical novelist. After having thought about the question, I have come to the conclusion that if we do not view her as a Gothic novelist, then we are not fully appreciating her works. What I mean is that the Gothic is missing a key author. The Gothic novel, through time, has pushed beyond exotic locations and escalates in a setting where the audience is familiar with the location. Burney's novels do just this; her characters are a part of urban society and experience the terror of an abnormal situation in a place where one would normally not see something violent. Further, critics who do not assess Burney in their arguments about Gothic novels will be missing a part of the genre and, therefore, missing a part of the definition that will make their argument complete. With Burney, a reader can understand that a Gothic novel does not always need a castle, ghosts, exotic islands, or violent sexual deviance. Instead, a Gothic novel can focus on the terror that one could experience in a familiar place.

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